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## Review of *Seeking Life Whole: Willa Cather and the Brewsters* by Lucy Marks and David Porter

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*Seeking Life Whole: Willa Cather and the Brewsters.* By Lucy Marks and David Porter. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2009. 235 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$47.50.

*Seeking Life Whole*, eighth in Fairleigh Dickinson's series on Willa Cather, is a volume in two parts, with nine subdivisions, and excellent notes. Part 1 contains Lucy Marks's biographical account of the lives of expatriate painters Achsah Barlow Brewster and her husband Earl H. Brewster, and David Porter's biographical and critical account of the previously unknown relationship between the Brewsters and Willa Cather. The Brewsters went to Europe after their marriage in 1910 to dedicate themselves to painting, nature, study, and a simple, beautiful way of life; they attracted a remarkable range of friends. Their type has been satirized, by their friend D. H. Lawrence among others, but Marks demonstrates their authenticity and its precarious foundation on subsidies from family and friends. Their story is an important part of the history of the expatriate generation, although it has nothing to do with the Great Plains beyond Achsah's erroneous mention of Red Rock, Kansas, as Cather's home at one time.

Cather met the Brewsters through her friend Edith Lewis, Achsah's roommate at Smith College. She came to know them better in France and Italy on visits in 1920, 1923,

and 1930. Porter elucidates these encounters, adding considerably to our knowledge of these trips, and shows how Cather's five letters to the Brewsters also reveal more of her relationship with Lewis. He describes the similarities in the artistic principles of Cather and both Brewsters and the way these were embodied in her work, noting parallels but stopping short of calling them direct influences or prototypes. The combination of these sections gives a lively sense of the *Zeitgeist* shared by writers and painters alike.

Part 2 consists of a useful checklist of Brewster Archive materials at Drew University; a detailed description of Cather books owned by the Brewsters, most inscribed by Cather or Lewis, and paraphrases of the five letters from Cather to the Brewsters; Earl Brewster's brief memoir of Cather (a facsimile page, with Lewis's revisions, is included among the photographs and color reproductions of paintings in the illustrations); selections from memoirs by Achsah Brewster, daughter Harwood's autobiography, written at fourteen, and Harwood's later memoirs of her parents; and selected letters of Earl and Achsah Brewster. These were chosen to provide context for quotations and references in the biographical sections (making for some repetition), and to give a sense of the richness of the materials; indeed, one wishes the selections had been fuller.

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